

# ADDRESS

*TO THE NURSES AND PROBATIONERS*

OF THE

**Glasgow Royal Infirmary,**

*On the 2nd JANUARY, 1882.*

BY

PROFESSOR M'CALL ANDERSON.

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## ADDRESS.

MY LORD PROVOST, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,—When the chairman of the House Committee invited me to take part in the proceedings of to-day, my first impulse was to ask to be excused, as such public appearances are not much to my taste ; but on second thoughts it occurred to me that it might be thought ungracious were I to refuse to accede to his request.

It might have been supposed that I did not sufficiently prize the services which Mr. M'Ewen has rendered to the Infirmary, whereas I yield to no one in my high admiration of his unceasing labours of love, which, with those of his colleagues in the directorate, and with the active co-operation of your zealous Superintendent—my esteemed friend Dr. Thomas—have raised this institution to the proud position which it occupies to-day in the eyes of this great community.

Or it might have been thought that I was not sufficiently grateful for what I myself owe to the Infirmary. It is now four-and-twenty years since I resided for a couple of years within its portals, and I shall always look back upon them

as amongst the pleasantest and most profitable of my life. Nor can I forget that more recently, as one of the Physicians to the House, I had the opportunity of learning the first principles of the art of Clinical teaching, and of gaining an experience which has proved invaluable to me in the subsequent practice of my profession.

At that time we had as matron a lady, Miss Tait, who was keenly alive to the responsibility attached to her position ; who was ever anxious to make those around her comfortable and happy, and who contributed not a little to the improvement of the nursing department. She suffered unfortunately from several very serious illnesses, contracted for the most part in the discharge of her duties, and was at last compelled to resign her appointment. It is gratifying, however, to feel that the Managers have not been unmindful of her devotion to her work, and we who knew and appreciated her, earnestly hope that her life may long be spared, and that she may yet enjoy a fair measure of health and of comfort in her well merited retirement.

The present matron, Mrs. Strong, came to us with the highest testimonials, and since her advent there has been a still further advance in the quality of the nurses, whether regard be had to the class from which they have been selected, or to the training which they have received ; and she has thus fully justified the high encomiums which were passed upon her.

But I hope you will not for a moment suppose that in my

time the nurses were either inefficient or neglectful of their duties. I can only speak of my own experience, and I have no hesitation in saying that my wards were exceedingly well nursed, and I am happy to know that one of these nurses still remains in another capacity in the service of the institution.

In addressing a few words this morning to you, the nurses of the Infirmary, I must of necessity be very brief. I shall not insult you by reading you a lecture upon your work, as it is to be presumed that you have been carefully trained, and that, in a general way, you are well aware of what is expected of you; and I feel sure that in the exercise of your calling, which is at once a useful and a noble one, you are earnestly desirous of doing your duty conscientiously and well. But as I am in a position to regard your work from a somewhat different standpoint, you will perhaps allow me to suggest to you one or two reflections.

The first remark I have to make applies with equal force to the members of my own profession, and it is this—we must take care lest we look upon our patients merely in the light of cases which are to be treated on the same principle as a cabinetmaker repairs a piece of furniture, or an engineer a machine which is out of gear. For we must never forget that underlying the pain and suffering which is presented to us, we have to deal with human beings possessed of feelings like our own, and keenly alive to the influence of kindness and of sympathy—a kindness which must be displayed in

the gentle touch and the thoughtful consideration for the needs of those to whom we minister, and a sympathy which must not come merely from the lip, but from the inmost recesses of the heart—for a nurse, like a doctor, is nothing if she is not sympathetic.

There is a certain measure of truth in the remark that “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing,” and in the case of the nurse the very knowledge which she has acquired may possibly lead to her ruin, by disqualifying her for the exercise of her calling. If she is not possessed of a well balanced mind, she may, perhaps, think that she knows much of which she is ignorant, and presuming upon this, to desire to command rather than to obey; while one of her most indispensable qualities is to carry out to the letter the instructions which she has received, and not to allow her own views to dictate the course which she is to follow.

But while this is undeniable, it must also be admitted that there are occasions when she is thrown upon her own resources, and must decide for herself upon the measures to be adopted. When, for instance, a sudden change takes place in the symptoms of the patient, she must consider the propriety of modifying the instructions which she has received, and must for the moment act on her own responsibility. This is what may be called a legitimate disregard of orders, but, at the same time, the medical attendant should at once be summoned, and on his arrival he must be informed of the change which has taken place, and of the

line of action which she has thought right to pursue. While, however, this cannot be gainsaid, care must be taken that the measures adopted are of the simplest kind, and as far as possible removed from treatment of a heroic nature ; and it is in these sudden emergencies that the highest qualities of the nurse come into play ; for undue timidity is as dangerous as undue boldness, and to be able to strike the happy mean is not always to be witnessed even among nurses who are thoroughly trained, tact and judgment being qualities with which some persons are naturally endowed, while others can hardly be said to know what they mean.

It would thus appear that while any nurse can discharge her duties faithfully, it is not every one who can attain the highest distinction, which, as in every other calling, necessitates a combination of qualities such as comparatively few can be expected to possess. It demands health and strength, high moral principle, tact, judgment, kindness, a combination of gentleness with firmness, and a sympathy which is ever ready to be extended to those who are suffering from sickness or disease.

But I must bring these few remarks to a close, as there are others who may wish to address you, and as the most interesting portion of this morning's proceedings remains, namely the distribution of the toys and other gifts which have been sent to the Infirmary in response to the eloquent appeal recently made by Mr. M'Ewen to the generosity of his fellow citizens.

We who have little children at home clustering around us, buoyant with health and happiness, at this merry Christmas time, or who have tended them when racked with pain and sickness, or watched perchance by their bedsides, as they passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death, cannot fail to sympathise with the little sufferers within these walls who have been torn from their homes by accident or disease, or who have nothing which is worthy of the sacred name of home. We desire, while confiding them to the tender care and skill of the medical officers, to aid them in their efforts by contributing toys and presents, the work of loving hands, and the contributions of tender hearts. We do so in the hope of being able, if it were but for a moment, to erase the lines of care and suffering, and to wreath their little faces in a smile of joy. We wish to let them feel that, though separated from their parents and little brothers and sisters, there are others who care for them, and who wish to make them happy. We desire, in our imperfect way, to follow the example of our great Master, who loved little children, and who said, in words which never can be forgotten, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."